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ABSTRACT

Pennsylvania is the third most rural state in the nation. The recession of the 1980s devastated the rural economy, leading to a brain drain from rural areas. Nevertheless, there's much that's right about rural schools. Rural schools have pioneered the use of distance education technology. Staff remain in rural schools because they like the surroundings, want to be near family, and like the sense of community. Dropout rates are lower in rural school districts. Education has been centralized through consolidation and statewide testing, but the core of rural education is community, which cannot be tested. The shortage of administrators is widespread. Teacher shortages are most evident in rural areas in the state's interior, especially among special education staff. The cost of special education has increased by 3000 percent since 1971, and vocational education costs have become prohibitive for some districts. The list of things schools are expected to be accountable for grows continually, yet time and funding are not increasing. Rural districts do not have the funding base to cover these costs. The state's funding system has changed every year since 1991, leaving some rural school districts to defend themselves by not spending. The lack of community colleges in rural Pennsylvania has prompted some districts to contract with out-of-state community colleges to provide courses. The expense of postsecondary education is becoming prohibitive for rural students, and the state college system is their only means of entering into higher education. (TD)

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THE STATE OF RURAL EDUCATION
IN
THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
2003
PRESENTED TO THE
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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Dr. Arnold Hillman
February 5, 2003

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Introduction

Chairman Stairs, members of the House Education Committee, staff and those in attendance. I am privileged to be able to be here today to speak about the state of rural education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is a singular moment for the 260 rural school districts to have this moment in time to lay before you the pertinent facts about what is happening in rural schools and communities. For those of you who come from rural areas, you understand that those terms are almost interchangeable. Schools and communities in rural areas live together on a daily basis and prosper or decline as a singular entity.

That may be difficult to understand from the viewpoint of the general public. However, rural schools were the overwhelming majority of schools in the nation until the very recent past. Education itself, derived its values from rural people at the beginning of the creation of the United States. The great arguments about public education in our Commonwealth were fought by rural people about such issues as private and parochial education vs. public schooling, the very language of schooling- German or English, the role of schools in the community and taxation.

Rural Pennsylvania and its schools still maintain many of those good, old-fashioned virtues- hard work, ethical behavior, truthfulness, attention to detail, care for one's neighbor's plight, frugality, and many more. As you may see on my bio, I am presently involved in two scholarship programs. In one, we had the former Dean of Students of Columbia University gather a premium group of admissions officers from some of the finest colleges in the Northeast to interview our students. All 20 of the students were from Franklin County. Five students were chosen for the scholarship. The reaction of the interview team was instructive. They each said that our students, all 20, were the equal of any students that they had seen in other places on an intellectual basis. However, they said that there was something different about our kids. They were honest, polite, straightforward, and easy to talk to. They were enthused about "mining" the Franklin County area for more of these students. I told them that they would have a ball if they went to all of the rural counties in Pennsylvania.

So What is Rural?

One of the first things people ask me when I am making a presentation is how do you know what is rural. It is a never ending discussion of people per square mile, economic indicators, geographic data and so many more things. Safe to say, "If you think that you are rural, you probably are." You know you are rural if the movies come out on video before they come to your theatre. You live horizontally, rather than vertically. You know that you are rural if you find yourself climbing up the water tower with a bucket of paint to defend your sister's honor.

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association has determined that there are 260 rural school districts in the Commonwealth. The majority of the school districts in the United States (14,841 in 96-97) are still rural. However, that is not to say that rural people are a majority of the population. In Pennsylvania, they are approximately 28% of the population.

In 1990, Pennsylvania was said to be the most rural state in the nation by population, 3.7 million souls. This was the official word from the census bureau. We are still trying to find out what happened in the 2000 census. We appear to have slipped somehow because of a new definition of rural. We are now 3rd in the nation. So, when you drive through Bald Eagle and Port Matilda (in the State College Metropolitan Statistical Area) you are in an urban area. There are some negative consequences of this action. There are some set aside funds for rural areas in the federal budget. These places are no longer eligible for these funds.

The Rural Economy

Of our 67 counties, 48 are over 50% rural according to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. As you can see on the map (divided into counties and school districts), 1979 was a year in which rural areas, by and large were in positive competition within the economy in Pennsylvania. In that year Venango County had the same per capita income as Delaware County. You could earn 40,000 dollars a year as a supervisor at Pullman Standard in Butler. Clarion County had 35 coals companies at which you could "drive truck" for double the amount of money that a teacher was making. The Commonwealth was still a net exporter of agricultural products and the diminution of family farms had not yet reached the epidemic proportions of the year 2003. The dairy farmers in Tioga County were getting 15 dollars a hundredweight for their milk (either the same as, or more than today).

The recession of the 1980's and its concomitant change in the way people work and made a living, was devastating to rural America and rural PA. Large companies, such as Pennzoil, Quaker State, Kendall Oil, Joy Manufacturing, Brockway Glass, Pullman Standard, either downsized, closed, or moved their plants to other states. Natural resources such as coal, natural gas and oil either diminished or were cut back because of new environmental standards. The rural parts of our state were caught in a time warp. Consequently a brain drain began that has seen 25-34 year olds leave their rural towns to go to where the jobs are. That is happening today as the unemployment in rural PA shows us. Of the highest unemployment rates among counties, the overwhelming number are rural.

The dichotomy in the economic base of our State has produced some alarming disparities in the personal income of our people. In 1979 the difference between the highest and lowest average personal income within a school district was 345%. In the year 2000 it was 785%.

Rural Schools

Rural schools come in many sizes, shapes and populations. We have school districts that are one complete county and do not have one traffic light and one that is 33 miles long and three miles wide. In actuality, the largest rural school district is Keystone Central with 980 square miles. The smallest (unless you count West York) is West Middlesex in Mercer County which is 51.7 square miles. This compares to the smallest urbanized districts in PA that are less than 1 square mile.

There is also a difference in student population. Pocono Mountain in Monroe County (still rural) has 10,500 students and is the 14th largest district, by student population, in the state and Austin School District in Potter County which has 276 students K-12. Right now consolidation is not an issue in public discourse in rural areas. Actually, the last actions on the geography of rural school districts has been de-consolidation. The large geographic expanses make consolidating school districts an almost impossible task. There have been a number of studies in the state that have shown that consolidation may also not be cost effective. Consolidation also flies in the face of the most current literature about successful schools. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that in most cases "small is better." There will be a study conducted very shortly under the auspices of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, by Dr. Wenfang Yan of Indiana University comparing county schools to other school districts with a similar number of students and similar characteristics.

What's Right About Rural Schools

Rural schools have the amazing capacity to do what is needed to provide a good basic education for its students. One would think that technology is a method of delivering schooling that began in a wealthy suburban community. However, that is not the case. Although there have been initial efforts across the state to bring teachers and classrooms together over a microwave system, the first real distance education occurred in the early 80's with a physics course taught from Southern Tioga School District to Heber City, Utah. It was followed by a course taught from Juarez, Mexico to Venango Christian High School in Oil City. Some of the greatest innovations have had their roots in rural Pennsylvania. The first kindergarten probably began in Titusville, Pennsylvania in the late 19th century. In the late 1980's, Titusville created at 0-1 building which may be the only one of its kind yet. Governor Ridge did the first school district webcast from the Harmony School District in Clearfield County

Rural people are proud of their schools and they continue to look to innovation to compete in the 21st Century. But as they are inwardly proud, some of the greatest innovations go unpublished. I can recall a remark when I was a superintendent of a small school district in then rural Berks County. " Do what you think are good things for our kids, but don't make a big deal about it and don't put it in the papers." That's the way it is in rural schools. Do

all of the wonderful things that we can afford, but "Don't make a big deal about it." Some people view that as stoic, but having lived most of our adult life in rural places, it's much more of a positive attribute. It's more like get things done and then get on with it to the next task. We have many things to do before the sun goes down. Don't spend any extra time doing publicity.

There is a different feeling among most staff members in rural schools. There is a closeness with students that is not felt elsewhere. The sense of knowing the community, the people in them, who the children belong to is a powerful force for good in school/community relations. Recently I had the need to help a young man in one of the scholarship programs that I am involved with. He is in college and needed some legal advice. He also needed some help for his brother in a school district neighboring the one he went to. Without any hesitation, I called the superintendents of both of the school districts. Please remember this young man does not go to either of their schools and in one case never went to the school. Each of the superintendents went far out of his way to help this young man with legal advice, help in finding a residence for the brother of the young man and a host of other things. They both told me, Arnold we'll take care of it. This is powerful medicine in this sometimes nano-second society of constant change.

Staff in these rural districts does not work for the money of it all. If that were true, they probably would be working elsewhere. There is something else that drives them. It isn't always altruistic. Many of them are "homers." They come from the school district in which they teach or from a neighboring district. They are pleased with their surroundings, always wanted to be close to their families and came back after college. Another group came from somewhere else- either with a spouse or from areas in which they really did not want to work. They felt that they needed a different sort of community. Of course, there are always those that could not get a job elsewhere, but they do not stay very long. Why should they, when the salary in Council Rock School District (Bucks County) averages $76,480 for 17.3 years of experience and 4.6 years of education, while Forbes Road (Fulton County) pays is staff an average of $40,877 with 17.6 years of experience and 4.5 years of schooling.

Dropout rates in rural schools are very low. Somehow, I have always connected the staff in the school with that low figure. I have seen, with my own eyes, teachers refuse to allow a student to drop out. The staff member called every member of the family and chastised them for ever allowing this youngster to think about dropping out. If one does drop out, where do you go? If there are no jobs, or you need a car to go to a job, how will you get the money to do it? Not that kids don't do that, but at a percentage much lower than other parts of the state. There is something in rural Pennsylvania that abhors sloth.

The reform movement in education may have missed some of the most important aspects of successful schooling- home/family/relationships, caring/closeness. These are all things that are present in most rural schools in profusion. Sometimes they go just a bit overboard.

When I caught my two elementary principals in cahoots with the cafeteria staff not allowing students to throw any food into the trashcans and forcing them to eat all of their peas, carrots, beans, etc., I had to ask them to hold off a bit.

Reformers as Outsiders

By the end of the 19th century, the cities and metropolitan education began to become the model for successful schools. Philosophers and educationists began to see rurality as a passing phase through which civilization had to go through in order to reach the higher plateaus of development. So, metropolitan models began to make their way into rural life. School consolidation began to become the fad. Hundreds of thousands of school districts were consolidated. Large high schools were created with promises of more state dollars. Consolidation peaked sometime in the 1970's, but still rears its head from time to time. Today, the 14,841 school districts in the United States are the result of those efforts.

However, rural areas did not die. They changed and even thrived through the early part of the 20th century, only pausing during the Depression years. We became the breadbasket of the world after World War II and supplied goods and services produced by our rural areas to all part of the world. In schools, centralization was the order of the day. States began to see homogenization and state curriculum and standardization in licensure for teachers and administrators as positive evidence of rural areas conforming to "good" practices. By the mid 1960's consolidation diminished Pennsylvania's school districts from 2500 to 505 and then to 501 (because of the integration of the Woodland Hills S.D.). The state had finally seen to it that the number of schools in the Commonwealth could now be managed. The introduction of Intermediate Units was another way of disseminating information and directions to schools within the state.

In 1969, Pennsylvania created a state-wide test called the test of Educational Quality Assessment, to see if consolidation really worked. It was never really used for that purpose. It was used to compare school districts and put them into bands of schools with certain expectations (as it is done today with the PSSA). Now with a set of numbers, the state could then look at the XYZ school district and tell them that they were not doing a good job. However one looks at this process of centralization, it is certainly an exercise of anti-intellectualism. It assumes that there is only one way of doing things and that someone has discovered that one true way.

The very core of rural education is community. That is something that you cannot test. I ran a very large vocational agriculture program when I was a superintendent. We had students from 4 school districts in our vo-ag. shop. The students there could not be distinguished from the adults that seemed to come and go with regularity. These were local farmers who had either brought something for the kids to work on, were talking to them about no-till corn, or were creating some horticultural design in the hothouse. The FFA was a constant presence, as was the Young Farmers. I was constantly at events sponsored

by local farm groups and spent an inordinate amount of time judging FFA oratorical contests (the only thing that they trusted me with). They showed at all of the statewide shows and events and even went to national events. Tell me how one could test that. Is there now even time to do these things? Is it any wonder that centralization and the changes in our economy have conspired to shrink these programs and make them disappear? Education in all areas of the state will improve when the context changes. We must make efforts to focus on the community, rather than pre-ordained paradigms from the state and the federal government.

Staff

In a recent poll the by the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, the 180 members were questioned about whether there were deficiencies in applicants for all teaching jobs, as well as specific certification areas. The answers were different in different parts of the state. At the borders of the Commonwealth, there did not seem to be problems with securing teaching staff in almost all areas. However, in the interior of the state, rural areas were losing staff to school districts that were paying from 2000-5000 dollars more. Those were the people referred to above as the group that does not stay long. The most pressing need in all of the schools that responded is for psychologists. Because of the expansion of special education programs these candidates are at a premium.

There are also great needs in the area of administration. There are far fewer candidates for these positions than ever before. In 1977, there were 144 candidates for a superintendency in Berks County. Today, the search process may bring 10 or 12 candidates for a rural opening for superintendent and possibly 30 for a suburban school district. Cities are also burdened with fewer candidates for these positions. Some answer the lack of administrative applicants, especially high school principals is a result of the increase in the salaries of teachers over the years. A 180 day teaching job might only pay a few thousand dollars less that a 265 day administrative position. There is also some evidence that fewer teachers have administrative certificates. It is common to find districts competing with their neighbors for the same candidates or even enticing administrators away from their neighbors. This makes for inconsistency in the running of schools.

Rural school districts grow their own certificated staff members. In small rural districts, science staff might be certified in biology, physics and chemistry. Math teachers might be certified in all of the needed math courses. Districts pay for these staff members to take these courses to get certified over the years. Sometimes, a student who graduates from the high school is encouraged to major in certain subjects when they go to college, so that they may come back and take the place of their high school teacher.

Transportation

As it is expected, transportation is a major activity of rural school districts. The kinds of

roads, the weather, and the placement of housing all go to make transportation a formidable job. For rural schools, priorities in transportation are the safety of the children, qualified bus drivers, times of arrival and dismissal and bus routes. There can be no more difficult conversation with a parent than where to put a bus stop. In reality, all parents would like to have the bus stop in front of their house. In fact, in homes that are very far off the road, parents would want their child to be picked up in their driveway. The balancing of these competing variables makes any snafu in bussing a school board activity.

Because of Pennsylvania's geography, there are bus routes that defy the imagination. There is no certainty where a person might build their house. There are school districts that are so large that they have several different weather fronts. Deciding to call off school is a major life decision for school officials. Many superintendents actually ride the roads at 3 o'clock in the morning, to see for themselves what the roads are like. At the end of the morning at about 5:00 a.m. the decision is made. Consequently, half of the people applaud the decision and half promise to be at the next school board meeting.

Filling out forms for transportation reimbursement is an art onto itself. The questions of whether to contract out or run one's own transportation program are major decisions. Routes, age of buses, number of kids in each bus on each route, activity buses can drive a rural business manager to distraction. In small and rural districts, the person who does those jobs also does many other jobs. It is a wonder to me that school buses are the safest means of transportation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. With the millions of miles of travel, there are minimal accidents and fewer injuries or fatalities. When one says that the priority of the transportation system is safety, it is so.

Lots of Jobs

I am not sure that you remember the TV show "In Living Color." In one of their skits they described an immigrant population that worked at many jobs at the same time. The jokes were shown as the people took off their various uniforms and clothing showing them to be policeman, doctors, janitors, nurses and so on. Think of that kind of frenetic activity when you think of the staff in rural schools. Not only administrators, but teaching staff, support staff, nurses, librarians, custodians and the like, all sharing in the wealth of doing more than what is expected.

Just recently, I ran into the quintessential combination of staff- nurse, athletic director, part time guidance counselor and grant writer. The guidance counselor had resigned in middle of the year. The district asked if she would fill in. The other jobs were just kind of normal things that she did. Many administrators function in just such a manner. It is common that the principal who is in charge of grades 7-12 (housed in one building), is also the grant writer, Title I coordinator, in charge of all curriculum, maintenance supervisor for his building and on and on. Many might look at this compilation of activities, and say, isn't that great. These people could probably take the place of five people in a wealthier school

district. However, that it not true.

At the end of the day, in the 12th or 14th hours of decision making, people get worn out. The decisions made at the earlier part of the day are the ones that can stand the test of scrutiny. There is no doubt that this juggling of many balls creates serious problems. At the end of the day, things just don't get done- a grant isn't submitted, a recommendation for a students is not sent in on time, some chemicals are not ordered, a discipline case is not disposed of, etc. Many people doing these jobs would argue that this is not true, but it is. Rural schools tend to have a superintendent, two principals and a business manager. In very small rural schools, the superintendent serves as either of the other two.

School Construction

In the mid- 1970's Tom Heslep, former Superintendent of the Altoona School District, became the head of school construction at the Department of Education. As a superintendent, building a new building in my district, I had an opportunity to see first hand the development of the Plan-Con document, installed by Dr. Heslep. It was one of the most difficult things that I had to do during my superintendency. There were many parts to it and each part had to be passed by the school board and then sent to the Department of Education. It was a lesson in bureaucracy. I am told that it has not changed very much since.

The other thing that has not changed since the 1987, is the reimbursement per student from the state. Those figures determine how much reimbursement school districts actually get. School board members in school districts with high aid ratios (let's say .70) think that they will get 70% reimbursement. When the final totals are submitted through Plan-Con you would be lucky to get 40 or even 35%. That reimbursement does not come all at once; it is doled out each year of the bond issue. In a small rural district, who gets to do all of these parts of Plan-Con.? If you have a wonderful architect, they might do most of it. However, the commissioned officer of the school district (superintendent) better read every small word on each document.

What reason would a school district have to do something with its buildings? In many instances, the building is "not up to code." That means that the Department of Labor and Industry has either made an inspection or the district itself has seen the bare wires, wooden floors and asbestos in the floor tiles. These are not things to be taken lightly. Most (over 80%) of the activity in school construction is really re-construction or renovation. The plethora of laws relating to handicapped accessibility, special education and the like have forced school districts to change their buildings.

Some districts throw up their hands and say, "we have got to build new, renovation will be too much money, the building will not come out right and the Department of Education will not approve the renovation and will not reimburse us." For that reason, rural schools

have built new buildings. The cost of construction has increased five fold since 1971 compared to the inflation rate of four fold. With all of the new regulations about building materials, ADA regulations, safety codes, and local regulations, the costs have gone through the roof.

Building on because of special education has also become a part of construction. In former times, when handicapped kids were kept in closets, basements and outside facilities there was no call for additional space. Now it is the law. The spaces provided for handicapped youngsters must be equal to those of other students. It is therefore incumbent to design space for these kinds of students that may be specialized.

There is also a need to include technology accessibility throughout the entire building and even the school district. LANS, WANS, T-1 lines, cable access, DSL and a myriad of other connectivity devices are a must for new and old buildings. There is no choice in the matter. If you want your students to have the advantages that other students have, there must be technology. Connectivity is only one of the additional costs.

The advantage at this time is that the interest rates are low. So a district can float an average coupon rate over a 30 year period of 5 percent and still be able to have people buy the bonds. This has led to a spate of new buildings in recent times. It is taxpayer friendly for the initial pass through. However, it still is a long term expense with such things as balloon payments, costs of bonds and issuance fees, bond counsel and other costs. There are some rural school districts that have saved funds each year and put them in a capital reserve account to be able to pay some or all cash for a construction project. This reserve must be used within 5 years. Other school districts keep their unencumbered funds in a separate account and pay it out over more than 5 years. This may account for some large fund balances in some rural school districts.

Special Education

The cost of special education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has increased by 3000% since 1971. Total costs have increased by about 500 percent. To give you a perspective, the inflation rate from that time to this increased 372%. The reason for this dramatic change is the passage of the Education for the Handicapped Law in the mid - 1970's with a secondary act passed a few years later. This was one of the most well supported programs in a political sense. There were few people who could object to this great endeavor. In actuality, special education change has its roots in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In 1972, then Governor Shapp signed a consent agreement with the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) to give equal rights to handicapped students. This was the beginning of a number of legal actions nationwide that soon led to EHA. The federal government, when it passed the law, promised that they would provide 50% of the

funding for special education (later the promise was changed to 40%). The total amount of federal dollars these days is around 14%. The rest of the funding is either passed on to local school districts or subsidized by the state.

In 1991, the state changed its funding law from an "excess cost" system to a "hypothetical" formula system. The reason for this was said to be that both school districts and intermediate units were allowing more students into the special education system and that the state was absorbing these "excess costs," and that there were not controls over its growth. Since 1991, the costs have risen dramatically and the number of students in the system has increased. One of the great differences is that local school districts now absorb any additional costs for this ever expanding program.

As an example of how this system affects rural schools, in 1998-99 a small rural school district in the South Central portion of the state was spending $167,000 for its special education program. With 585 students, K-12, it could handle that kind of expense with moderate increases from year to year based on the state's reimbursement of hypothetical percents of special education students. In that year, a foster home opened in this small community. The majority of these students were multi-handicapped and needed a great number of services that the school district did not have the capacity to produce.

The school district sought outside help for these children and bore the additional costs. That year, the costs increased to $670,000 for the special education program. In a small rural school district, where a mil might bring in $25,000 that is an enormous increase for the local people to absorb. Since there was an emergency fund administered by the Department of Education, the school district asked for some help. The Department offered and gave approximately $4,000 in the first year to augment the school district's payments.

There are a number of questions that arise in this situation. It is certainly true that the federal government has not fulfilled its obligation. The change in the state special education funding system has not had the affect that was conceived- there are massive new costs and more students in these programs. While some school districts are not adversely affected because of the number of special education students in their communities, certain districts are living at the edge. There is no one who doubts the need for such programs. However, rural schools will continue to have trouble paying for them.

Vocational Education

Vocational Education has been around in public schools for many years. At first it was the way of education across this nation. When most jobs involved physical labor, vocational education was a way of elevating skills, so that students could get higher paying jobs and have a more prosperous life. In 1950, the dropout rate of students in American Schools was 50%. Only the elite went to college. The G.I. Bill created a whole new generation of students with high aspirations beyond the physical labor jobs of their parents.

By the 1960's, it was obvious that there would need to be a different way of offering vocational education. While big cities had vocational schools for years, suburban and rural schools, by and large, were lacking in these edifices. In the mid 1960's, the Vocational Education Act produced funds for such buildings. By 1967 Voc-Tech buildings sprung up across the Commonwealth. In some more conservative areas, this did not take place until the 1970's.

These buildings were seen to be an alternative to the general and locally run wood and metal shops in the high schools. In many instances , these new schools provided the newest forms of vocational teaching, equipment and a true business/education partnership. Craft committees were formed with a General Advisory Committee being instrumental in guiding the entire school. There were schools with the most novel programs, with the most modern tools and equipment. There were also schools that kept a narrow focus on fewer shops with specialized training.

As adults began to ask for courses at the vocational technical schools, there was a rush to provide all manner of new instruction from commercial driver's licenses to computer training. In some instances, these courses far outstripped what was being offered in the daytime to the secondary students. At a time when special education was in its infancy, vocational schools were not seen as an alternative. However, by the late 1970's, there was an interest in sending certain high functioning special education students to "learn a trade." By the late 1980's the trickle became a torrent, so that in many schools in rural and urban areas especially, the plurality of the students at a vocational school are special education students.

A parallel strand in vocational education has been the acceleration of technology and the vast changes in industry. No longer can the vocational schools (some now called career centers) keep up with the expenses of the new machinery that pops up new almost every day. Some of the more envelope pushing schools have sent their students out into industry for the full term of their existence in vocational programming. There is even one vocational school without a building in Lycoming County. These are called Campus programs. They are less expensive and are changeable at a moment's notice.

Vocational Education has changed so dramatically, that many rural school districts have seen the cost of these programs as a major barrier to sending students there. In one county, three of the five school districts that make up the vocational compact are sending less than ½ of the students that they sent 3 years ago. They are taking some of the programs back as a kind of consortium. There are many countervailing thoughts about vocational education. In the 1960's and 70's, as we, in Pennsylvania were building vocational schools, North Carolina was building community colleges. These schools are the center of all technical training and are the hubs of economic development across the state. When a company calls to get training for its workers, they are sent to the appropriate community college in the area to do the training.

In many rural areas, there is frustration about transportation to the vocational schools, the costs, the programs, the direction, the term (full day, ½ day turnaround, one year programs vs. 3 year programs), flexibility, etc. These are the discussions that mirror the discussions about Pennsylvania's economy. Hopefully, there will be parallel discussions among those who have the clout to change things.

Post-Secondary Education

For most of Pennsylvania's existence, there has been less need for youngsters to go on to further education beyond 8th grade and then high school. There were many good jobs in the mines, in the oil industry, glass industry, and large manufacturing facilities in rural areas, steel, railroads, agriculture, and natural gas and on and on. One could get a good family sustaining job and go into the place that your father had worked (and it was your father). At the beginning of the 1970's, things began to change and by the end of that decade (a watershed year in 1979), things changed.

As I stated above, the closing, moving out and downsizing of industry across the Commonwealth painted a new landscape. In urbanized areas, the changes were seen as progress. In rural areas, they were seen as tampering with the order of things. Family farms, the oil industry, the job your father had were just no longer there. In some of those industries, heavily unionized, the world was set on its head and no organization could bring it back. In the early 1980's, Pennsylvania ranked near the bottom of all of the states in the nation in its going on to college rate.

The most rural state in the nation could not move quickly enough as unemployment skyrocketed to 27% in places like Venango County. As is always the case, rural plights don't make the newspapers. As industry changed, there were some people who saw what was happening and knew that action had to be taken. In a series of articles in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Carol Hillman talked about what was happening in rural areas and caught the eye of the Heinz Foundation. In a stroke of philanthropic action, they funded a program called Bright Futures Unlimited in the Allegheny Clarion Valley School District to help communities to see what could be done about its young people.

This is just one example of how local people in rural communities endeavored to reach beyond the present circumstances to move into a new way of doing things. Activities like this took place in Bedford County, Somerset County, Warren County, Forest County and many others. School districts worked in their communities to elevate the vision for the children and their parents.

Because of the Commonwealth's history of a low post-secondary going on to college rate (despite the fact that we have the fourth largest number of four year colleges in the nation), a number of things were not present in rural areas. When the community college system was set up, there were no colleges placed in rural areas. The reasons for this are obscure.

Maybe the costs, the tripartite payers, the lack of perceived need or whatever, they did not exist. In the late 1980's a number of school districts in the Southern part of Pennsylvania contacted various institutions of higher learning to see whether they would be interested in providing courses in their locales for students to get introductory college courses, nursing courses, technical courses, etc. These requests were met with questions about funding, logistics and guaranteed numbers.

As a result of the lack of interest on the part of local institutions, a number of school districts, especially the Everett School District in Bedford County contacted Allegany Community College in Maryland to provide such courses. The story is not over yet. A new building in Everett, a center in Somerset and expansion into other rural counties provides all of the above coursework and enables local high school students to take college level courses, either live or online in their junior and senior years. This is a tremendous advantage to students in small rural schools who do not have access to advanced courses.

Actually, according to the College Board, Pennsylvania lags far behind in Advanced Placement coursework and test taking. In the year 2000, Pennsylvania was 64 students per 1000 less than the national average for students taking advanced placement courses. Certainly this is a legacy of the past, but it is also a sign that many of our rural schools do not have the capacity to provide these courses yet. We have one rural county where only 2 students took an AP exam. The Allegany County model must be replicated in other rural parts of the state.

One of the encouraging parts of present system of Community Colleges is the expansion of these institutions into Cambria County, Carbon County and Schuylkill County. There has even been an attempt to start a broader based community college expansion in the North Central part of the state. In the late 1980's, and early 1990's Senator John Peterson and now Representative Fred McIlhattan instituted a set of higher education councils in the Northwest part of the state to provide community college like course work for adults.

There is now a national problem of males going on to college. On the national level, there has been a dramatic turnaround in who goes to schools. At present 55% of the entering classes in colleges an universities are female. This problem has been described in a book called, "The War Against Boys," by Christina Ott Sommers. She has some political reasons why she thinks this is true. However, more important to this discourse is that the college board has found that this is an economic phenomenon. The lower one goes on the economic ladder the more the percentages vary. At the lowest level it is 65% girls and 35% boys. Above $100,000 in income it is 53% boys and 47% girls. This has great meaning to those who represent constituencies that are not wealthy, mostly rural and city people.

Going on to college rates have improved dramatically in the last 20 years. It is apparent that parents of current children understand a lot more about why students should go on to

post secondary education. However, there is an alarming new trend. As colleges become more expensive, strange things begin to happen. Those students, who formerly went to higher priced private colleges and universities, find themselves unable to pay the freight. So, they seek either state relateds, Penn State, or other somewhat state funded schools. In turn, students who formerly could go to those schools find themselves applying to the State Higher Education System of Schools. This had caused this kind of statistic. At one of our state schools, the President told me that at the beginning of his/her tenure the school was populated by 80% of the students whose parents had not gone to college. In the school year 2001-2002 this had changed to 50%. What will happen to our rural kids if they cannot have state schools as their means of entrée into higher education? This has been a common path for rural kids. Will we once more see a diminution of rural kids going on to higher education because of costs?

Academics and Curriculum

For those of you who have heard my diatribes about what schools have to do, let me apologize. For those of you who are hearing me for the first time, I have confidence that this is something that you have thought of before. Each time society has seen fit to make some change or another, it has asked to schools to be the entity to do it. Whether is was physical education, as a result of World War I, hot lunches as a result of World War II, integration as a result of Court Decisions, special education, sex education, vocational education, drug and alcohol education , the schools complied.

In most cases the changes were good for society. However, these changes all had some cost attached to them, both socially, educationally and monetarily. We have not changed our manner of running schools in over 100 years. If Rip Van Winkle would have fallen asleep in 1903, he would have little trouble understanding how our schools operate today. We are still limited by 180 days, and 6-7 hours of school during the day. We have bussing that sometimes enlarges the day, extra-curricular activities that make the day, the week and even the school year even longer. However, when we add just one thing to our time, we must make room for it.

The newest craze, statewide testing takes time away from our academics. The new state standards add new things but don't give schools additional time to do these things. The quintessential way in which people learn things is, "Time on Task." Reading takes time-math takes time-writing takes time- not to speak of science, social studies, the arts, and all of the other very important things that we would like to teach in schools.

Current testing and a rush to comparing schools, rather than looking at student's progress along a continuum have continued the march of "bandwagonism" in education. We never seem to try things for very long before something new comes around. Even with testing, we have had achievement tests, EQA, TELLS, TELS, TELLS, PSSA (many versions). According to the latest list, there are 884 schools in the Commonwealth on a watch list,

which means that we should see them improve. We argue about cut-scores that will tell us whether we are doing well or not doing well.

The word accountability is now thrown around to mean that we should be getting a bigger bang for our buck in educating our children. Currently we are spending $6.46 an hour across Pennsylvania to educate our 1,800,000 students. Are we then getting $6.46 worth of accountability? Rural schools suffer from the most insidious comparisons. In a most non-statistical way, they are compared to schools that have many more students. This means that 3 or 4 students in a small class could skew the complement of test scores so that a school could look like it is doing well one year and rotten when the class takes the test a number of years hence. These are just common sense kinds of things.

However, the more important issue about accountability is what are we accountable for? Let me ask you if these are the things for which schools should be accountable; *reading, math, writing, science, sex education, vocational education, special education, dropout prevention, attendance, post-secondary rates, teen pregnancy prevention, character building, safety, health, sports, extra-curricular participation, drug education, technology, career education, school-to work, breakfast programs, after school programs, lunch programs, community programs, art, music, history, physical education, parenting, how to make out your income tax.*

The list gets longer every year and with every administration. In small rural schools the capacity to do all these things diminishes with the number of things mandated to do. Recently in one of these small school districts, I was accosted by the business manager. She is not only the business manager, but everything else in the business office. You name it and she does it. She waved a sheath of papers under my nose and said, "Arnold, can you believe this, I have spent the last week, over 29 hours, both here and at home filling out these papers. Not only don't I have the time to do it, but most of this information is already available to the Department of Education on other forms." She was speaking of "Your Schools Your Money." The drive to transparency in describing ones school district to the public and the need for computerized descriptions has made it even more difficult for this set of people in small rural districts across the state to get the job done.

When we look at what could happen over the next few years, we are faced with problems of improvement that cannot be solved with only high moral purpose and hard work. To do such things as making class sizes smaller in the early grades and institute new full day kindergarten classes, one must have the funding to do that. Hiring new staff, having adequate supplies and materials, and creating space all cost money. Where will those funds come from? Where will the funds come from for such innovative ideas as Career Pathways and novel approaches to any sort of curriculum changes. There are answers to those questions. Some of the answers may be to take away some of the things that have been superimposed on the schools over the years. That may give them the breathing room to create new things.

Funding and Taxation

For those of you who know me, you understand that this has been a major part of my life for the past 26 years. I have been part of these discussions, the equity suit, and the efforts to make a system of school funding that would stand the tests of predictability, consistency, fairness to children and taxpayers, and adequate for our 21st century needs. Some folks think that my efforts have fallen on deaf ears. I do not believe that to be true. The activities across the Commonwealth, the discussions and votes in the legislature, the promises of the new Governor all tell me that we are going to do something.

Rural school districts have taken note of the unpredictability of the system over the past 13 years; In fact, there really has not been a "system" since 1991. Therefore we see some districts abandoning improvements that are needed to squirrel away sums of money in case there is, once again, a year when the state gives them no additional funds (as it has done twice in the last 12 years). You cannot blame them. The uncertainty of next years' deliberations in the legislature, the Governor's proposals and the reaction from the legislature make funding schools a poor way to run a cookie factory.

Each year since 1991, the funding for schools has had differing components. One of the most stable components has been the "small district assistance." It has saved small rural schools a great deal of trouble. Those pieces of money have compounded themselves over the many years, since 1987. Each year there are a large number of rural school districts, whose populations are 1501 and higher who bemoan the fact that they are in the same kettle of fish as others their size, but cannot get the money. Jokingly, one school district superintendent told me that he was going to tuition off a few students to a local catholic high school to get under the 1500 number.

In truth, rural districts spend less money than do their urban and suburban counterparts. So when we declare that 40% of school districts in the state are getting more than 50% of their revenue from the state, they are talking about lower expenditures. Of those 196 school districts that are funded over 50%, 126 of them are below the median (not the average) in instructional expenses. The other side of the coin says that we are expending a vast amount of money over what we did when the state was providing 55% of the instructional costs in 1974. That is true. The state funds a little over 35% of instructional costs now. However, if one looks at why costs have risen , one might look at the over 300% inflation rate since 1974 and the massive increases in special education (the state share is not included in instructional expenses). All this to say is that we have no system and that some rural districts are defending themselves by not spending and others don't have the money to spend, while others are spending and getting positive results.

Some believe that taxation, especially the real estate tax, is the root cause of all of our problems in school funding and the economy here in Pennsylvania. I am not so sure. I

believe that taxation is a problem for some areas and not for others. Further, we are the second aged state in the nation (Florida being older) and that represents a large group of people who come back to live here for a number of reasons. One reason is taxation. We are one of two states in the nation with a personal income tax levy that does not tax pensions. You can figure out which is the other one. In many rural areas, young people with education leave to go to where the jobs are. A large group of older people then remain to support the local economy and tax base. These people are even more frightened now with the massive loss in value of their 401ks, or other retirement instruments that they fear any increase in taxation for any reason.

We may chide these people for their narrowness of vision, but they are still only getting 1 to 2% on their lifetime of investments and savings. Many of these people thought that they could get along on their pensions and social security. They did not think about how healthcare, drugs, nursing home care might impact on their daily lives. They are truly apprehensive and they make their apprehension known to their legislators. These folks vote and everyone knows that. They vote in large percentages of their population, while students and young marrieds in rural areas do not vote in those numbers.

This makes changing the system of school funding and taxation very difficult. It is a balancing act that has seen a profusion of proposals in the House and the Senate. The new Governor has promised changes. However, with a 2 billion dollar hole in the budget, it may be hard to do.

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